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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [ASEC](#) [SOCI](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [ECON](#) [SG](#)
SUBJECT: SENEGAL: RIOT VICTIM NOT KILLED BY SECURITY
FORCES, HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS FOLLOW RIOT

REF: REF: 08 DAKAR 1467

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY DCM JAY T SMITH FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (SBU) In ref A Post reported that 21-year-old Mamdaou Sinna Sidibe had been shot dead by military personnel during a violent demonstration in the city of Kedougou in southeastern Senegal. During a follow-up visit to the city by Poloff and FSN Pol Assistant, Post determined that the youth was probably killed not by security forces, but by a rioter. For most of 23 December, 2008 the city was under the control of the rioters who caused massive damage to most of the city's government buildings. The aftermath of the riot was scene to gross human rights violations as reinforcements of special riot police arrived from Dakar to reestablish order and arrest suspects. Nineteen people received stiff sentences but were pardoned by President Abdoulaye Wade on March 17, 2009. End Summary.

Chronology

¶2. (C) The following is a chronology of events based on a series of interviews with representatives of the local government, journalists, human rights activists, and students:

07:00 Students gather for a peaceful sit-in at the city's main square adjacent to the city's primary intersection. This square is located opposite City Hall and very close to the Prefecture, the Tribunal, the post office, the governor's office, and the Customs House. It is some 750 yards down the road from an undermanned gendarmerie post.

07:30 Students are sent to nearby schools to encourage high school students to skip class and join the sit-in.

09:00 The leader of the Association of the University Students from Kedougou, Samuel Kali Boubane, gets up to make a speech. He is booed by a section of the crowd of people not affiliated with the students. Sources told poloff that at this point a group said, "There has been too much talking, it is now time for action." Militants go to a nearby gas station to get gas.

09:00-10:30 The riots begin. The small gendarmerie force, reportedly having determined that they are outnumbered and without adequate weapons and gear, retreat to their barracks. Some rioters go to the Governor's office and begin stoning it. The governor, Mamadou Diom, and his deputies are inside the building. As the rioters prepare to burn the building, the father of the owner of the building comes on the scene and tells them that it belongs to his son who rented the property to the government (Note: It has only been a few months since Kedougou was designated a new region following a campaign promise by President Abdoulaye Wade. Kedougou city is the capital of the region. End note.) The rioters relent. Simultaneously, another group of rioters attack the Prefecture, the Tribunal and the Prefect's personal residence. Subsequently, these buildings are all gutted by fire and everything that can be looted, including all of the city's archives containing documents such as land deeds and birth certificates, are taken. The Post office is stoned and

looted but not burned. Several government vehicles, two private vehicles belonging to the Governor and the Prefect, and two buses are burned.

-During this period of 1.5 hours the rioters return several times to the Governor's office. At some point in the lull, the Governor and his staff manage to escape and hide in a building behind their office. Following the third return of the rioters, the Governor issues a special decree calling for the military to intervene. The Governor told Poloff that he also issued a directive to use whatever force was necessary in order to reestablish order. Following this request, the Governor is exfiltrated by an army sergeant dispatched from a small military garrison that is based in the southeast quadrant of the city. A small detachment of soldiers is sent to protect the Governor's office.

10:30-11:00 The soldiers begin retreating from the Governor's office located on the west side of the city's aforementioned primary intersection. They head back east in order to make their way to the military camp. During this retreat the rioters stone the soldiers, some of whom are bloodied. Seventeen rounds are fired over their heads. The soldiers reach the intersection. Mamdaou Sinna Sidibe is shot. According to Colonel Sherif Mbodj, the Zone Commander of Zone 4 that includes the regions of Kedougou and Tambacounda who saw the autopsy report and was given the round that killed Sidibe, the shot was not initially fatal. Eye witnesses reported that Sidibe complained that his head hurt.

11:00-13:00 Upon seeing their colleague prostrate on the ground the rioters go berserk and begin to sack the remaining symbols of the state. During the small lull between the shot and the resurgence of the riot, the soldiers manage to escape to their camp, which now shelters some 140 officials and their families. The rioters proceed to stone the Gendarmerie building and its training facility located opposite. The office of the police intelligence division, Brigade de Surete Mobile, is burned. Rioters ransack and loot the Inspection Office of the Ministry of Education and an office belonging to the Ministry of Agriculture.

13:00-16:00 There is a respite in activities.

16:00 The rioters return to the streets. There are episodes of sporadic violence. Looting continues.

17:00 Colonel Sherif Mbodj arrives with some 100 soldiers from his base in Tambacounda approximately 2.5 hours north of Kedougou. His units drive through the town in armored personnel carriers and establish a cordon around the city. He orders them to secure the headquarters of the state electricity company Senelec and the phone company Sonatel. He dispatches troops to the small local airport where there are fuel storage depots.

20:00 The riots end as security forces regain control of the city. The governor and his deputies remain in the military camp overnight.

22:00 Local leaders, following negotiations with gendarmes, issue a call for calm via Radio Dunya. This call is later reiterated via smaller community radios.

04:00 (24 December) More reinforcements arrive, this time from Dakar, including squads from the Legion de Gendarmerie d'Intervention (LGI) and Le Groupe d'Intervention de la Gendarmerie Nationale (GIGN). Both teams are specially trained riot control units.

12:00 More reinforcements arrive by plane from Dakar.

02:00 (25 December) The LGI and GIGN begin to round up suspects. Eye witnesses report that they all wear ski masks and that the round-ups are targeted. The squads include informants.

Governor: Unprepared and Unsympathetic

13. (C) Governor Diom, who arrived in Kedougou in November 2008, said that the riot had taken him by such surprise that he had placed no extra security on his office. He added that the evening prior to the riot he had sent the Brigade Commander of the local gendarmerie detachment to talk with the students, but to no avail. In reply to a question about youth employment and mining, the Governor admitted that the government needed to do a better job of communicating with the local population: "The state is doing a lot of work here.

I have been a Prefect in other regions and what the state is doing here I have not seen before. Also, people need to understand that large scale gold mining is very new and that jobs, especially those needing skilled labor, won't be available overnight." But the Governor was also critical and unsympathetic of the local population: "Arcelor Mittal set up a vocational college here. Only five students are from the region, the rest are from other regions. They are lazy here, all they want to do is strike it rich working in small time mines and then blow their money on women and booze."

14. (C) The Governor was blunt regarding the one death that occurred during the demonstrations: "As for the killing of the youth, this was an unfortunate event," said the Governor, "but the army had nothing to do with it. The bullet that killed him was not of the type they use. That being said, I gave the order to use whatever force they deemed necessary, so even if they had killed any demonstrators in the line of duty it would have been legal, based on an order that I issued which empowered them to use lethal force to stop the looting and destruction."

Corruption and Abuse Creates Discontent

15. (C) Two journalists underlined that the problems in the region are deeper than just frustrations over a perceived lack of employment. According to Ibrahima Sory Dabo, who works for the well known independent Dakar-based newspaper Walf-Fadjiri, corruption is endemic. He gave as an example the case of Mittal, which is paying 2,000,000 CFA (USD 4,000) a month to rent a building for Kedougou students attending Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar. 1.6 million (USD 3,200) of that pays for the rent and the remainder is allegedly being pocketed by the Director overseeing the fund in the Ministry of Mines. Dabo added, "This region has never voted for Wade and this is why they are trying to intimidate local civil society leaders." Karim Ndiaye, who works for Radio Futurs Media, said that people were further incensed due to reports that 80,000 hectares of land had been sold to Spanish investor Raoul Barosso and rumors that the President's son, Karim, is the actual investor. The President of the Women's Association of Kedougou, Awa Ndiaye, was very critical of the heavy-handed approach of the security forces. "When we were at the Gendarmerie trying get our kids released we could hear them being beaten. They began to make their arrests at 02:00; they beat people, broke down doors, and arrested the family members of the suspects in order to get them to divulge the locations of their kin." (Bio Note: Ndiaye comes from a very influential local family and her brother ran for Mayor in the March 22 local elections. End Note)

Army Confident of No Wrongdoing

16. (C) Colonel Sherif Mbodj, who was not on the scene during the riots, was adamant that his soldiers did not kill Sidibe.

Colonel Mbodj, who served with the United Nations in Rwanda during the genocide and has held a variety of key posts within the Senegalese military hierarchy, has extensive experience with crowd control and knows the region well. He underscored that because the army was asked to reestablish order he was in charge of coordinating operations on the ground and that he gave firm orders to his men that they were only to fire above the heads of the rioters. "If my troops had fired into the crowds a lot more people would have died. Had it been one of our bullets that killed Sidibe, it would have gone right through his head and probably killed the guy next to him as well." The autopsy revealed that the bullet

was lodged in his brain. "The soldiers were trying to retreat. We think that he was shot by a weapon stolen when the demonstrators stormed and burnt the customs office or the tribunal." He said the fact that, on the night of the killing a group of people tried to take Sidibe's body from the morgue, which was under guard, raised questions about whether the demonstrators had something to hide.

Comment

¶7. (SBU) While an investigation may never reveal Sidibe's killer, the evidence to date points to the rioters. Aside from a newspaper report the next day, there has been no other evidence to suggest that Sidibe was killed by the military. Accounts of the riot largely support the conclusion that an overwhelmed military acquitted itself appropriately and with a high degree of restraint. However, the same cannot be said of the Gendarmerie's special riot squads who, by all accounts, committed gross violations of human rights as people were rounded up, beaten, tortured, harassed, held hostage and/or thrown in jail during efforts to apprehend suspects. It is clear that these squads as well as the prosecutor in charge of the case were all under orders to reestablish order as quickly and as firmly as possible.

¶8. (C) Equally troubling, the Government of Senegal does not appear to be addressing the root causes of the riot. As the deputy of Colonel Mbodj pointed out, he had never seen this kind of destruction in the 17 years he served in the separatist rebel-threatened Casamance region. This does not suggest, however, that the frustration has dissipated. Unemployment remains high and land rights are a major issue. Furthermore, the proximity of Kedougou to the porous borders of Mali and Guinea-Conakry adds an extra level of volatility to an already tense region. A key source of the population's dissatisfaction, however, remains the government's failure to manage expectations of what benefits will accrue to the region from the mining sector. The government, for example, has yet to spend any of the CFA 3.6 billion (USD 7.2 million) in a Mining Social Fund promised to finance infrastructure projects. This frustration may well be exacerbated by the type of disdain shown by both the Governor and Military Zone Commander for the people of Kedougou and their concerns.

¶9. (C) Post has urged the Minister of Mines to join the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) to help prevent the people of Senegal from suffering the same fate their counterparts in other African countries have faced when precious minerals are found, exploited and exported without benefiting the local populations. It will take a coordinated effort by the state, the mining companies, and local leaders to better manage the region's resources, both mineral and human, to prevent a recurrence of the December 23, 2008 riot.

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